

POLAND'S YEAR OF CHANGE

Gomulka on the Tightrope

LUCJAN BLIT

UP TO a year ago the political situation in Poland was as plain and obvious as the political situation in Moscow's East German puppet state is today. Until the spring of 1956 Warsaw was still the capital of a Soviet satrapy. Then came the revolt, in June 1956, of the workers of Poznan, the aftermath of which was more revolutionary than the event itself. For the first time in the history of a Communist state, anti-Communist revolutionaries went unpunished—and not only went unpunished, but were officially honored in the end as brave men who had helped redeem their country.

Poland's present leader, Wladyslaw Gomulka, is a life-long Communist. Yet the almost universal respect in which he is held by Communist as well as non-Communist Poles is owed to the fact that he rebelled against his party and government in 1948 and spent years in jail for it. And even more of the respect he enjoys is owed to his refusal on October 19, 1956, in a Warsaw surrounded by Soviet tanks, to obey the orders brought to him from Moscow by Khrushchev, Molotov, Mikoyan, and Kaganovich (and some say by Zhukov too).*

However, to judge from Poland's voting record in the United Nations, she still belongs with Czechoslovakia, Rumania, and the other puppets of Moscow, and her for-

eign policy continues to be dictated to her by the Kremlin. Now and then, when the issue is minor, Polish delegates to the United Nations have separated themselves slightly from the solid Soviet bloc, but whenever the basic interests of Moscow or its satellites are involved, they join it promptly.

In foreign relations, Gomulka has never departed a hair's breadth from Moscow's line. The massacre of the Hungarians, at the end of 1956, dealt a terrible shock to the Poles, and there is good reason to believe that Gomulka felt it too. But when a joint delegation of Polish writers and journalists went to him to ask that he help the Hungarian refugees, he lectured them coolly for ninety minutes on the *raisons d'état* that made it impossible for Poland to defy Moscow openly in relations with other countries. In May 1957, at the Ninth Plenary Meeting of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers party (which is Poland's Communist party), he went out of his way to declare that he was a firm supporter of the foreign policy of Soviet Russia and her satellites. And with characteristic frankness, he chose to illustrate Poland's position on foreign policy by referring to her attitude toward the Hungarian revolt. "We may

*The Moscow communiqué announcing the demotions of Malenkov, Molotov, Kaganovich, and Shepilov at the beginning of July was received with real joy in Poland. Party meetings were called that same evening to celebrate rather than discuss the event. The Warsaw newspapers were the only ones in Communist Eastern Europe that published background stories. They interpreted the dismissal of Molotov, Malenkov, and the rest as a sign that Moscow had really abandoned the "conservative" (Stalinist) idea of ruling the Soviet empire by mere force; and also as a portent of the final failure of the Polish Stalinists, who had been still expecting a Moscow-sponsored return to the old pre-October 1956 methods.

PERHAPS the most astonishing development in the post-Stalin Soviet empire is the precarious independence which Gomulka has been able to secure for Poland. LUCJAN BLIT, who reports on the present Polish situation, lives in London and contributes to many British periodicals as well as to the *Jewish Daily Forward* in New York. Our issue of last March carried his first article, on "Poland and the Jewish Remnant."

differ from other [Communist] parties in our appraisal of the events in Hungary," he said. "But this does not alter our general view that, to preserve peace and the security of all socialist countries, the assistance of the Soviet Army in the suppression of counter-revolution was a sad but inevitable necessity."

A moment later he mentioned "with real sympathy" Mao's "hundred blooming flowers." China was the power whose influence, according to Polish Communist sources, saved Poland from Hungary's fate last October. (Ochab, Gomulka's predecessor as general secretary of the Polish party, visited Peking in September 1956, a few weeks before the great changes in Warsaw.) I have been told that Mao Tse-tung himself encouraged Gomulka to resist Khrushchev and his colleagues when they unexpectedly descended on Warsaw in their effort to choke off the first open rebellion inside the Soviet empire. But Chinese support still could not, and cannot, provide Gomulka with much room for maneuver in matters of foreign policy. At the same time it is obvious that he does not accept Russia's lead in foreign policy out of true inclination or sympathy. This he revealed this past June—and it was not the first time he did so—when, in addressing the workers of Poznan, he defended Poland's adherence to the Warsaw Pact, which sealed the East European Communist coalition, solely by pointing to her geographical situation.

ON THE home front, moreover, Gomulka firmly rejects any idea of following the Soviet model. At the same Ninth Plenum of the Polish party Gomulka categorically refused to accept "any universal forms of [Communist] construction." Unlike most other Communists today, Gomulka does not blame Stalin alone for all that went wrong in Russia. He has said: "It is possible to ask a simple question: if the Soviet Union, on its road to socialism . . . had escaped the disease of the cult of personality, would the Russian road to socialism have then been acceptable to all other countries in

the world and, still more important, would it have been a necessity for them? Probably not, indeed certainly not. A proof of this is the declaration of the 20th Congress of the CPSU that, given certain definite conditions, there is the possibility of a transition to socialism by parliamentary means, without a violent revolution."

Gomulka not only rejects Soviet Russia as an example for Poland to follow, but lets it be known that he regards the Soviet "road to socialism" as "a path of thorns." Rhetorically, he has asked whether "the Soviet Dictatorship of the Proletariat could express an extended democracy for the working masses? Could the noble slogans of socialism be fully expressed in life?" And he has answered: "Obviously not." He has even gone so far as to say that he accepts the fact of the Russian Revolution only because ". . . history does not evolve in accordance with wishful thinking, but in accordance with its own laws."

Again and again Gomulka has said that it is Russia's backwardness that is responsible for the way the Soviet system has developed. Though he does not say it in so many words, he thinks that Poland and the other satellite countries have started on their "road to socialism" with a superior civilization as compared with Russia's, whose own experience, "shaped by her historical development, is not at all necessary, or useful, for other nations." Those who spoke such words would certainly have been locked up or shot in the days of Stalin, and they still would be in Khrushchev's Russia. For Gomulka and his supporters, not only have the Soviets not created the ideal system that other Communists are duty bound to imitate, but the system they did install has developed on lines that ought at all costs to be avoided.

Gomulka's desire to change the Soviet-model economic system that had been imposed on Poland after 1949 was made clear on the very first day of his return to power. At the Eighth Plenary Meeting of the Central Committee, in October 1956, he stated that a mixed economy with a strong private sector was the only salvation for a

Poland ruined by Soviet economic planning. He boldly rejected forced collectivization, though collectivization has been a prominent criterion of genuine Moscow Communism since 1929, and Lenin himself in the first years of the Bolshevik Revolution had declared that private peasant holdings endangered the future of the Communist system ("... peasant small-scale production breeds capitalism and a bourgeoisie every day, every hour, by a natural process and on a mass scale").

To support his argument, Gomulka gave the following figures on Polish agricultural production in 1955:

	<i>Per cent of land owned</i>	<i>Per cent of total production contributed</i>	
State farms	12.6	8.4	
Collective farms	8.6	7.7	
Private farms	78.8	83.1	[sic]
	<i>Per cent of livestock production</i>	<i>Value of output per hectare (zlotys)</i>	
State farms	5	393	
Collective farms	4	517	
Private farms	91	621	

He estimated the value of the production lost by Polish state and collective farms in 1955 at 755 million zlotys, and this despite the large government subsidies to "socialist farming." This was by way of preliminary to his announcement, as head of the state, that all subsidies to collective farms were to be cut off immediately. He added that "if as a result . . . the development of collectivized farming is slowed down, then, in my opinion, we shall lose nothing from either the economic or the political point of view." He ridiculed the orthodox Communist idea that "socialism in the countryside could be built on the basis of misery and the decline of peasants' holdings." Six weeks later, when I arrived in Poland, at least 75 per cent of the country's 10,000 collective farms had already been dissolved, and "common property," including agricultural machinery belonging to the state, was being divided among as many farmers as could reach for it. The forced collectivization of

Polish agriculture is now finished for good. Moreover, some kinds of compulsory deliveries to the state have been completely abolished, while the prices paid for others have been substantially raised.

The peasants have taken full advantage of the changed situation. They now look for the best markets for their products and sell on them, heedless of the press's denunciations of "speculation." They are no longer afraid now to acquire more land, livestock, and machinery. At the same time the abusive term "kulak" has disappeared from the Polish political lexicon. No class in Poland at present is getting more out of the country's meager economic and financial resources, or turning them to better use, than the peasantry, and the peasantry amount to between 45 and 50 per cent of the country's population. Poland's economic plan for 1957, as passed by the Sejm in May, keeps investment expenditure in "socialized economy" at the level of the previous year, but investment in agriculture will be increased by 20 per cent.

THERE can be no doubt that the change in Polish investment policy from heavy industry and armaments to food and consumer goods is sound and wise from an economic point of view. But it certainly does not conform to Communist economic policy as practiced in Khrushchev's Russia or in any of the other satellites. The pumping of a considerable proportion of Poland's resources into her villages, accompanied by outspoken encouragement for the development of private enterprise, has great political importance, and affects the whole of national life. In Poland's towns, too, though to a much smaller extent, private property and enterprise have been made respectable again, and here and there these have even been helped with small state loans. Since last October, 18,000 new private undertakings have been started.

The situation of Poland's industrial workers is less favorable. Though the miners, for instance, have had their wages substantially increased and, what may be of even greater

importance, they have been freed from compulsory work on Sundays—in 1956 they were obliged to work twelve Sundays a year on top of their six-day week, in 1955 they worked twenty-six Sundays—strikes have become a regular feature of Poland's life, however much the regime itself may dislike them. The 1957 economic plan insists grimly that no further wage increases will be granted because the shortage of some foodstuffs and industrial products has already caused a wave of hoarding, speculation, and black-marketeering. Extensive unemployment and inflation were both prevalent under the previous regime, but the relaxation of administrative controls and compulsions has served, inevitably, to aggravate them for the time being.

THE workers have retained one advantage from last October's revolution—their Workers Councils. The wave of enthusiasm in which these were set up must have been very similar to the atmosphere in Moscow in 1905, when the first workers' Soviets were born. The Polish workers saw in the Councils of 1956 a means of acting independently of the fossilized and often hostile bureaucracy of the party and trade unions. In many factories the Councils secured the dismissal of managers and foremen who had been appointed by the previous regime, and proposed to embrace planners, managers, and trade unions as well as workers in a single guiding body for each plant. Now approximately half of all industrial undertakings in Poland have Workers Councils. But their scope of activity is being narrowed daily.

The state planners object to the Councils because of their interference in economic matters. The trade unions, which had been steadily losing their influence over the past decade, when the party used them only to make the workers more obedient slaves of the state, are now afraid that the workers will adopt the Councils as their representative organizations, which would render the trade unions themselves superfluous. But the trade unions have become a vested interest of bureaucrats, and so has state plan-

ning. In their struggle against the Workers Councils, these vested interests have, as it happens, the help of Gomulka himself, who evidently feels that the Workers Councils are dangerous and must be restricted to as narrow a sphere as possible.

Though the leading elements in the Workers Councils were among those most active in bringing about his return to power. Gomulka made no great effort at the Ninth Plenum to hide his lack of enthusiasm for the Councils. He named a lot of things that they ought not to be: "The Workers Councils are not organs of political power of the working class, nor are they units of the administrative machinery of the People's State. They are not a form of collective ownership of an industrial establishment. We have rejected as unrealistic the idea of constructing some sort of a hierarchic pyramid over the Councils. The Workers Councils do not and should not have any funds to cover their activities. The Councils do not and should not have any state positions." And Gomulka closed his attack upon this particular form of spontaneous workers' democracy with an ominous warning: the Councils were creating a "favorable ground for the infiltration into its ranks of influences alien to the working class, and frequently even hostile to it." By then it had become quite plain why he distrusted the Workers Councils: he saw in them—and saw rightly—a rival of the party and of its trade union organization, both of which he alone controlled.

But Gomulka's condemnation of strikes and his objections to the Workers Councils do not have the force of law. Today the workers of Poland feel freer as citizens, more independent as trade unionists, and are not afraid to stay away from work when they want to; the miners stayed away four days last Easter. No repressive acts, administrative or political, have followed the many strikes which have taken place during the last year, and Gomulka shows no sign of wanting to restore that terror of the secret police which had ruled in Poland until last October.

MOST of the hated figures in the secret police and the judiciary have been quietly fired. But the average Pole does not regard the "rehabilitation" of the dead victims, or the compensation paid the ones who survived tortures and prison, as sufficient recompense for the nightmare which for years was his daily companion. A resolution adopted by the Ninth Plenum more than hints that it was Russia which was really responsible for the terror in Poland. An outraged public opinion has forced the party leadership to decide to try publicly the three most culpable of the secret police torturers, Rozanski, Fejgin, and Romkiewicz.

This is only one instance of the right which the Poles now enjoy to express their opinions on any subject of general interest, and to express these in such a way that their rulers cannot afford to ignore them, even if they are not ready to obey them. This is one of the most fundamental differences between the Poland of 1957 and all its Communist neighbors. Whereas Gomulka's predecessor, Bierut, tried to destroy, physically and morally, anyone who sought to express or influence the feelings and thoughts of the Polish nation independently of the regime, Gomulka tries to win his people over by persuasion, by convincing them that his policy is the only one practicable under present conditions in Eastern Europe. How far he has succeeded in this was shown in the elections to the Sejm last January. "If you do not vote for my list, Poland will cease to exist as an independent state," he told the Poles on the eve of the elections. The nation gave him an almost unanimous answer.

The Polish Sejm is not a parliament in the Western sense. Slightly more than half of its deputies are members of the Communist party, and in a free election that party would be lucky if it got 10 per cent of the nation's vote. To what extent the non-Communists included among the candidates of Gomulka's Front of National Unity represent the true feelings of Polish society is not easy to say. But it is certain that under different international circumstances many of

them would not have been elected. Yet the present Sejm is trying genuinely to voice some of its constituents' real aspirations. It has expressed its determination that government by decree, even though it is the basis of Communist constitutional law, should cease. Instead, Poland will be governed by legislation, and every bill will be minutely scrutinized by one of several standing committees, and then discussed by the whole chamber before being voted on. The new Sejm has provided for at least two sessions every year, and has fixed the time of year by which each must start. And it has further provided that only the Sejm itself can close a session, so that the length of its deliberations will be in its own hands. Shortly, it will vote on a proposal to liquidate the Soviet-patterned Ministry of State Control and replace it by a Supreme Chamber for State Control that will be more in accord with Polish tradition. The pre-war right of deputies to demand explanations from ministers on matters of public concern has been restored, and good use is now being made of it, as was shown by the question put to the prime minister about the behavior of the Soviet troops in Poland during October 1956.

Although thousands of opponents of Communism, or of Communism on the Soviet model, have been released from prison and "rehabilitated," only one non-Communist organization—an organization that in its very nature will always be outside the Communist pale—has had most of its rights and powers restored to it. The Roman Catholic Church has not only regained its full internal freedom in Poland and its right to acknowledge openly that it owes its supreme allegiance to an international body whose seat lies outside the reach of Communist power: it has been formally appointed the teacher of morality to the children of Poland now and in the future.*

When Boleslaw Bierut died in March

*See "Poland and the Jewish Remnant" by the same author in COMMENTARY of March 1957, for the repercussions of this step on the remaining Jews of Poland.—Ed.

1956, the head of the Polish Church, Cardinal Wyszynski, and seven of his bishops were in prison, either serving heavy sentences for alleged criminal and political offenses, or interned without being under any particular charge. The regime, in full accordance with the practice in all other Communist countries, was trying to break the local Church's links with Rome and at the same time to isolate its upper hierarchy from the lower ranks of its clergy. The ultimate aim was to make the Church entirely subordinate to the state.

A week after Gomulka's return to power, on the 28th of October, 1956, Cardinal Wyszynski was released from his place of detention in southeastern Poland, and returned to Warsaw amid great popular enthusiasm. Those were the days of the ripening Hungarian tragedy. Gomulka and Wyszynski were men of the people, and knew their people. They both agreed on the need to save the country from the great catastrophe that could so easily have overtaken it at that time. The Cardinal called on the Poles to accept Gomulka's regime and, what was psychologically more difficult, not to oppose Poland's adherence to the Warsaw Pact. Gomulka, in return, agreed to hand back to the Church its monopoly on the religious instruction of Polish school children. The Church would no longer sponsor a political underground, and Marx would be taken down from his prophet's pedestal. Whichever way the adults would vote every five years, their children would be brought up in the ways of the universal church, and the Pope in Rome would remain their Holy Father. Whatever happened in day-to-day politics, the spiritual home of the Poles would be a Western-oriented church.

At the Ninth Plenum Gomulka, referring to the great privileges the Roman Catholic Church had won since he had been in power, said: "It is clear that this state of affairs does not accord with the world outlook [*Weltanschauung*] of our party. The same situation [meaning the rights accorded the Church in Poland] cannot be found

either in other socialist states, or even in such capitalist countries as France and the United States."

What then is left to justify calling Gomulka's Poland a Communist state?

GOMULKA, and the political machine under his control, are Communist. They have agreed to the liquidation of "socialized agriculture." They have ended the rule of police terror—nobody, as far as we know, is in prison in Poland today simply because of opposition to Communism. They tolerate strikes in factories owned by the Communist state. They have even agreed to admit the Church into the country's schools. But where Gomulka remains a Leninist is on the question of power. He will not share power with anybody. He believes in his right to dictate. And now, when his overthrow would mean the removal of the last barrier against direct Russian intervention in Polish affairs, the Poles consent to his dictatorship. With a determination equal to that which he has shown since 1948 in resisting Soviet encroachments upon Poland, he rejects any thought of introducing political democracy.

In Gomulka's six-hour speech at the May Plenum, no other subject provoked his ire as much as the demand for full democracy. He condemned his right-wing opponents, the "conservatives," as he called them—the ones who longed for the days when everything looked so safe to a good Communist, when there were no difficulties in the way of simple obedience to Moscow, and when the police truncheon was the sure answer to every question. This opposition, which consists of a small group of outright Soviet agents and a much larger group of dull-witted party hacks ("*apparatchiki*"), could become dangerous only if Moscow attempted to engineer a coup in Warsaw and were ready to risk having Poland go up in flames. For the time being, however, Khrushchev does not seem eager for a Polish repetition of Hungary—and the Polish version would be far larger and much more violent. As long as Moscow refrains from a direct mili-

tary attack the Natolin group may constitute a nuisance, but it will remain politically impotent; as it is, its members are despised as "foreign agents" and they lead an isolated life even inside the party.

THE real danger, as Gomulka sees it, lies in that movement within his party which he calls the "Revisionists," to which nearly all the Communist intellectuals of Poland, and especially their younger generation, belong. No name could be more appropriate for them than "Revisionists." When I was in Warsaw last December I spent a long Sunday afternoon listening to a prominent Communist political writer telling me how foolish and simple some of Gomulka's friends were who thought that Stalin alone was to be held responsible for the nightmare called Soviet Russia. He felt that honest Communists would have to have the courage to probe further, and find out what was wrong with the theories of Lenin himself.

The true nature of liberal democracy is a subject of profound controversy in Gomulka's party. The publication of parts of George Orwell's *1984* in a popular Warsaw weekly was but one of many ways in which Polish intellectuals signified their rejection of dictatorship. But only a few weeks after the events of October, Professor Julian Hochfeld, vice-chairman of the United Workers party in the Sejm and director of the Warsaw Institute of International Affairs, had already published an article in which he rejected the Marxist account of liberal political democracy as a bourgeois trick to deprive the workers of their rights. A young and able sociologist, L. Kolakowski, has developed these ideas further, writing: "... Democracy is a risk, but it is a risk worth taking."

Those Polish writers and poets who appear in *Nowa Kultura* repudiated Socialist

Realism and the whole mythology of the dictatorship of the proletariat as long ago as 1955. The younger Communist intellectuals have made the weekly *Po Prostu* (Plain Speaking) a vessel of enlightened revolt against the theory and practice of totalitarianism. Sociologists, philosophers, and political journalists, after having grown up in the Communist United Workers party, are now discovering truths in the Social Democracy of Karl Kautsky and Leon Blum, thinkers who abjured the violent extremes of right and left in the years when democracy was in greatest danger in Western Europe.

Gomulka sees this socialist and liberal trend inside his ruling party as offering the greatest threat to the Communist retention of political power in Poland. As long as Poland continues to be surrounded by countries ruled by orthodox Communist regimes, Gomulka may be tolerated by his countrymen as a ruler who, though a Communist, remains a good Pole nonetheless. But if his own party should give birth to a new democratic socialist movement and if external conditions change, then his regime may well turn out to have served only as a holding operation on the way from Communism to democracy. Gomulka has recently declared war against the "Revisionists." But it was the very people he applies this label to who just a year ago, in the October days, created the psychological and moral bridge between him, the Communist rebel against Moscow, and all those fellow Poles who rejected Communism no matter what country's clothes it wore. If Gomulka expels the "Revisionists" from his party he will be preparing his own political destruction: he will then enter into an isolation in which he will no longer be feared by those Communists outside Poland who now eagerly await the chance to extirpate this dangerous heresy.